

# South Sioux City residents propose agreement to save city money in odor problem

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The exterior of Big Ox Energy is seen in this photo taken in South Sioux City on Oct. 24.

**SOUTH SIOUX CITY |** South Sioux City homeowners who have been forced to flee due to odor issues connected with the startup of the Big Ox Energy plant drafted a list of demands for the company or the city to approve.

The documents were presented to the City Council at its meeting Tuesday. The nearly one dozen residents created the document in an effort to try to shake any accountability they may have after the potentially toxic hydrogen sulfide gas permeated through their residential sewer system.

The odor has permeated everything the residents own, from their furnishings to their wardrobes, with a horrible hydrogen sulfide or rotten egg smell. The residents have since been put up in hotels, and Big Ox has said they would pay for rooms, meals and mileage, industrial cleaning of homes, and engineering costs for the city.

The document stated that after Jan. 31, 2017, the residents will find temporary housing and pay for it out of their pockets. But in the meantime, Big Ox must pay for the expenses while the house is vacant. On the form,

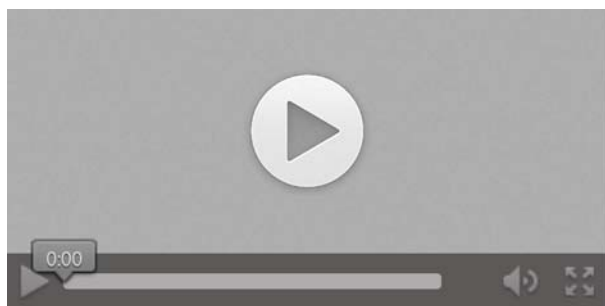
the residents filled out how much their mortgages, insurance and utilities cost a month.

"We have a form; we filled it out. It basically says more or less what our demands are for the next six months. We're giving the city and Big Ox six months to figure out what the hell is going on, because they obviously don't know," Klassen said after the meeting.

Klassen said the purpose of the document is to clarify that if the residents accept money from Big Ox or the city, it does not account for compensation and does not waive their right to sue. He would not answer who drafted the document.

"We are trying to save them money -- to help them budget," he said. "... We were trying to craft (the demands) in such a way we weren't putting a bigger burden on the city."

There are one-on-one meetings planned Wednesday with the residents, Big Ox and city officials to assess the damages, but Klassen said the 10 households that filled out the sheet will not speak with Big Ox.



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"We are giving them an out for six months until they figure out what they are putting into our homes," Klassen said. "We are not going to sit down with them and say, 'Hey I need a coat of paint,' when it is something else."

Big Ox and city engineers went into homes earlier this month and [conducted pressurized smoke tests](#) on the pipes to identify potential leak points inside the homes.

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The residents at previous meetings have expressed concerns that the high-pressure tests could cause further problems to the pipes. If a sewer-related problem should occur, the residents would not be accountable for the costs, the document lays out.

Mayor Rod Koch was not at the meeting, nor could any council member comment per advice from legal counsel, Council President Oscar Gomez said.

Originally on Tuesday's council agenda, Bill Garvey requested that additional measures should be considered to solve the odor problems such as conducting an intense search for experts in forensic plumbing, sheet rock analysis and insulation analysis and hiring a chemical engineer to analyze sewage coming from Dakota Avenue to track down offenders.

Garvey was not at the meeting, so Gomez said those measures will not be discussed since the [one-on-one meetings](#) were going to address those issues.

The subsequent agenda item with Garvey's request was for the council to discuss potential litigation, but since no action was taken, they refused to discuss it.

The odors began in October soon after Big Ox started up its Roth Industrial Park plant, which converts various organic waste into methane gas. Originally, the Wisconsin-based company tried to remedy the problem by [injecting chemicals](#) into the waste stream. After that effort failed, the city halted flows from the plant into the sewer line until a permanent solution could be found. The city in November appointed Des Moines-based McClure Engineering to propose a plan, which included temporary valves while a separate wastewater main was constructed. But weeks after the proposed fixes by McClure, the council admitted that little progress had been made and the problem was more complex than expected.



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